

October 20, 2000

What is the DOJ Hiding?

Watchdog Sues Clinton-Gore DOJ for Withholding Prosecutions Data

What is the Administration trying to hide?

Syracuse University is home to the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), a non-partisan outfit that regularly collects and analyzes data on federal law enforcement activity. Since 1989, TRAC has collected such information from the Justice Department (DOJ) and has distributed it to the public. Earlier this year, the Clinton-Gore Administration shut off the spigot, refusing to share prosecutions data with TRAC. According to a TRAC press release [<http://trac.syr.edu/data/jus/eousaFOIA.html>]:

"The Justice Department is denying news organizations, public interest groups and the general public access to comprehensive information about how the Clinton Administration has enforced the nation's laws. . .

"The Justice Department has not fully explained the reasons for clamping down on the data it previously had promised to provide TRAC, or its reasons for withholding information for current periods it had routinely released in the past."

TRAC responded to what it calls a "blinding of the public" by filing suit against DOJ's Executive Office for United States Attorneys. The left-leaning Public Citizen Litigation Group is representing TRAC.

Why is the Clinton-Gore Administration withholding prosecutions data so close to an election? According to TRAC, the data blackout leaves the public in the dark:

"The blocking of the flow of government data means that the public is unable to obtain information required to accurately judge how the Clinton administration, federal prosecutors and the federal investigative agencies actually are dealing with such subjects as protecting the environment, reducing gun violence, prosecuting pornographers and defending the American people against spies and terrorists."

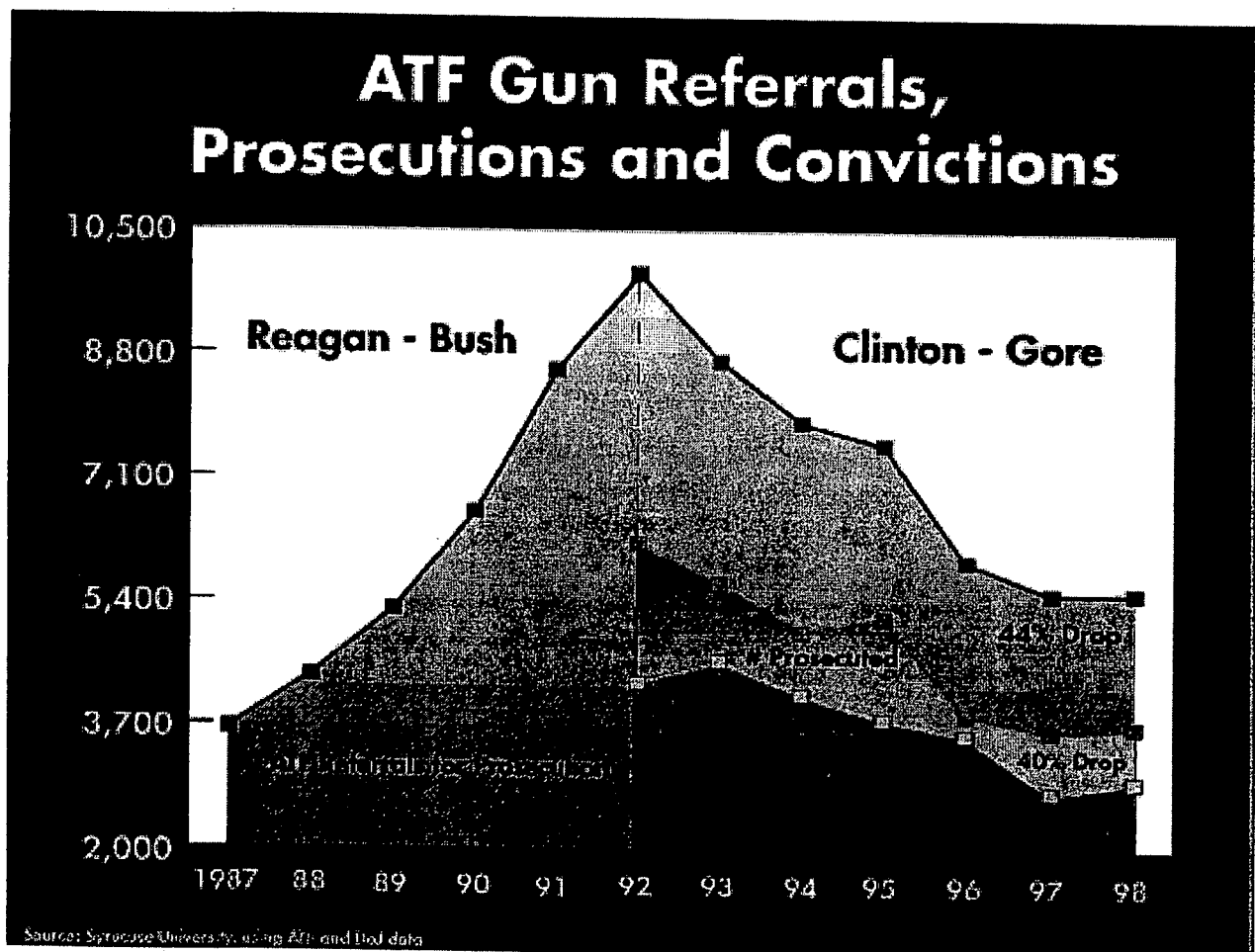
Indeed, it seems the Administration is opposed to any objective analysis of its record:

“While withholding the full data from the public, the Justice Department itself has used some of the information in carefully restricted press releases and submissions to Congress to advance Clinton administration policies and to respond to criticism from several House and Senate committees and elsewhere.”

In one of these areas, reducing gun violence, the Administration has come under fire as a direct result of TRAC's work. In 1999, TRAC sounded the alarm that Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms (ATF) referrals of firearms violations for prosecution dropped 44 percent from 1992 to 1998 (see chart). According to TRAC:

“The administration now claims that weapons referrals are sharply up in FY 1999, but has refused to provide TRAC the underlying data to support these claims. . . . This abrupt withholding means that for the time being it will be impossible for users to compare the criminal enforcement actions in the last full fiscal year of the Clinton Administration with those of actions taken during fiscal years 1992 to 1998.”

The Administration should not be permitted to bury this information.



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